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IYMAN FARIS SENTENCED FOR PROVIDING MATERIAL SUPPORT TO AL QAEDA

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Attorney General John Ashcroft, Assistant Attorney General Christopher A. Wray of the Criminal Division, and U.S. Attorney Paul McNulty of the Eastern District of Virginia announced today that Iyman Faris was sentenced to 20 years in prison for providing material support and resources to al Qaeda and conspiracy for providing the terrorist organization with information about possible U.S. targets for attack.

Faris, a/k/a Mohammad Rauf, 34, of Columbus, Ohio, was sentenced this afternoon by U.S. District Court Judge Leonie M. Brinkema, at federal court in Alexandria, Virginia. Before sentencing Faris, Judge Brinkema denied Faris' request that he be allowed to withdraw his guilty plea.

Faris, a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Kashmir, pleaded guilty on May 1, 2003, to casing a New York City bridge for al Qaeda, and researching and providing information to al Qaeda regarding the tools necessary for possible attacks on U.S. targets.

"Iyman Faris - a seemingly hard-working truck driver - betrayed his fellow American citizens by scouting potential terrorist targets for al Qaeda," stated Attorney General John Ashcroft. "For that betrayal, he will spend the next 20 years of his life behind bars. I commend the prosecutors and agents who worked to apprehend this al Qaeda facilitator and make our nation safer in the face of the ever-present threat of terrorism."

"This case is a significant accomplishment in our mission to prevent another terrorist strike in the United States," said U.S. Attorney Paul McNulty of the Eastern District of Virginia. "Severe punishment awaits those who assist terrorists."

Faris has admitted traveling to a training camp in Afghanistan in late 2000, where he was introduced to Usama bin Laden. Faris admitted that during a meeting in late 2000, one of bin Laden's men asked him about "ultralight" airplanes, and said al Qaeda was looking to procure an "escape airplane." Faris admitted that about two months later, he performed an Internet search at a café in Karachi, Pakistan and obtained information

about ultralights, which he turned over to a friend for use by al Qaeda.

Faris also admitted that during a visit to Karachi in early 2002, he was introduced to a senior operational leader in al Qaeda. A few weeks later, the operational leader asked what he could do for al Qaeda. Faris said he discussed his work as a truck driver in the United States, his trucking routes and deliveries for airport cargo planes, in which the al Qaeda leader said he was interested because cargo planes would hold “more weight and more fuel.”

According to Faris’ admission, the operational leader then told Faris that al Qaeda was planning two simultaneous attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. The al Qaeda leader spoke with Faris about destroying a bridge in New York City by severing its suspension cables, and tasked Faris with obtaining the equipment needed for that operation. The leader also explained that al Qaeda was planning to derail trains, and asked Faris to procure the tools for that plot as well.

Faris admitted that upon returning to the United States from Pakistan in April 2002, he researched “gas cutters” - the equipment for severing bridge suspension cables - and the New York City bridge on the Internet. Between April 2002 and March 2003, he sent several coded messages through another individual to his longtime friend in Pakistan, indicating he had been unsuccessful in his attempts to obtain the necessary equipment. Faris admitted to traveling to New York City in late 2002 to examine the bridge, and said he concluded that the plot to destroy the bridge by severing cables was unlikely to succeed because of the bridge’s security and structure. In early 2003, he sent a message that “the weather is too hot” - a coded message indicating that the bridge plot was unlikely to succeed.

Federal law prohibits the providing of material support and resources to designated foreign terrorist organizations. Al Qaeda was designated by the Secretary of State in 1999 to be a foreign terrorist organization, and redesignated as such in October 2001.

The Faris case was prosecuted by attorneys from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Virginia and the Counterterrorism Section of the Criminal Division, U.S. Department of Justice, along with assistance from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Ohio. The investigation was led by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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